DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 027 554 CG 003 016

By-Weber, Carlo A.

Religious Aspects.

National Association of Student Personnel Administration, Detroit, Mich.
Spons Agency-Food and Drug Administration (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
Pub Date Mar 67
Note-8p.; Paper presented at the National Association of Student Personnel Association Drug Education Conference, Los Angeles, Ca., Mar 10-11, 1967.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.50
Descriptors-Behavior Change, *College Students, Drug Abuse, *Emotional Experience, Individual Differences, *Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, Mental Illness, Moral Issues, *Religion, Self Concept, Self Evaluation, Sensitivity Training

This paper considers the nature of the religious experience involved in hallucinogenic drug ingestion and the percentage of students using drugs for this purpose or using a vocabulary of mysticism as a subterfuge and rationalization for motivated activity. The operational characteristics of religious experience are described. Neo-mystics draw their language from the East, and consistent through it are the following: (1) loss of normal ego-functioning, (2) reduction of reality testing, (3) dropped learned patterns, and (4) lowered defense patterns. This mystical ego loss is similar to the psychotic condition and verbal reports of drug induced experiences. An experiment noting behavioral similarities between drug induced experineces and mystical consciousness is cited. Other studies suggest some people are predisposed to readiness for religious experience. Additional research is suggested to determine similarities and differences in the ego loss experience of mystics, psychotics and acidheads. Synthesization of mystical experience is raised as a moral question. (NG)

ED 027 554

PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
Drug Education Project (1967-68)
Background Papers - Series II

Religious Aspects[1]

Rev. Carlo A. Weber, S.J.
Director of Psychological Service
Loyola University of Los Angeles

At almost the close now of what has been a day and a half of what Dr. Bruyn has described as a smorgasbörd of fact and opinion about this complex issue and in the face of the dilemmas and frustrations confronted by administrators, I am not altogether sure right now whether the placement of the religious aspects of the drug at the very close of this program constitutes an indication of culmination or of last resort.

I am asked to restrict myself to the religious aspects, but am very tempted to comment on many of the points that Dr. Bruyn has just made, and those that have gone before. However, we are to think at this point about the conceivable relationship between the use of the hallucinogenic family of drugs and religious experience. Dr. Alpert last evening suggested that his experience was a re-experience subjectively of that of the Buddha or possibly of the experience of Christ.

I should like to contend with two points this morning. First of all the nature of that religious experience which is alledgedly involved in LSD ingestion, and conceivably the number of students, or percentage of students whom we may guess are using LSD for this purpose, or are simply using the vocabulary of mysticism as a subterfuge and rationalization for otherwise motivated activity. The very fact that religious experience has been associated so often with LSD suggests that it would be rather naive of us to pass off this particular aspect of the psychedelic movement as a fad or phase, and simply discount the claim of religious experience. For one reason, the use of toxic plant substances, as you know, to induce some mystic feeling or communion with the gods, for meditation, is not just a new fad; it has been known in primitive societies for millennia. Peyote, as has been described for you, has been used by the Indians in the southwestern United States for generations. A substance which they call Teo-nanacatyl, or God's flesh, clearly represents for them a rite the equivalent of a communion rite. In Mexico the crowning of Montezuma was accompanied by a mushroom rite, a religious ceremony. And in the area of the Rio Grande the use of peyote buttons or dried cactus plants, as you know, has become the focal ritual of a religious sect identified since 1918 as the Native American Church. The cry of the psychedelic religion consequently is scarcely a new one.

---

1. Paper presented at NASPA Drug Education Conference, Region VII, Los Angeles, California, March 10-11, 1967. The NASPA Drug Education Project is supported by Contract No. FDA 67-3, with the Food and Drug Administration, Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare.

CG 003 016

I think our primary dilemma in approaching this question is inherent in the very definition of what constitutes a "religious experience." This is a matter I would suggest of our concept or notion of faith. But faith itself is a chameleon among human phenomena. It can mean many things. It can mean the assent to a series of propositions or it can mean the more personalistic assent to a person, as in the case of one's belief, in the person Jesus Christ or Buddha or Mohammed. As an assent or response, faith is in some way observable. But as a purely subjective experience it is precisely private and unobservable.

Dr. R. D. Laing, author of several remarkable books, The Divided Self and The Self and Others, describes our customary notion of faith as "the scientifically indefensible belief in an untested hypothesis, or as the belief in a reality that is not evident."

St. Paul, of course, says that faith is the proof of realities we do not see. This, I believe, is the sense in which we commonly use the word. The dilemma arises precisely when the believer states flatly that his faith has become empirically verified by some personal experience of what hitherto was not evident. At that point faith is no longer a belief in the obscure or untested, you see, but it becomes a personal encounter with that which was previously unknown. The cloud of unknowing, a constant mystic phrase, as you know, which hung over the assent to the untested has been lifted. There are many instances of the movement from the faith of the unknowing to the faith of vision in Christian literature and it is this I would like to attend to.

Paul of Tarsus, for example, was picked up by God, thrown to the ground and blinded for three days; and in that direct experience, his faith became a vision which itself tested the unknowable, in which the unknown became somehow known. It will be in this latter sense of faith becoming a vision, of the direct experience, that I shall use the words faith and religious experience interchangeably.

At the risk of great prematurity, I should like now to introduce an operational definition of religious experience as I mean it in this paper. I have drawn the definition from many different studies--from William James to Stace to the writings of the mystics themselves, Meister Ekhart, Teresa of Avila and so on. It corresponds in large part to a doctoral thesis published at Harvard in 1962 by Dr. Walter Pahnke entitled "Drugs and Mysticism."

The first characteristic of the religious experience is the sense of oneness, of unity, of brotherhood, of a kind of cosmic togetherness. The empirical ego in the sense in which we have been using it in this conference (which includes the patterns of our behavior, the ways one learns to cope with the environment, the defenses which one throws up against the environment) all are dropped in favor of an awareness of the inner world. The inner awareness generates what the mystics describe as the "all is one" feeling. One becomes identified with the inner self, the almost impenetrable core of self which for most of us remains shrouded in mystery through the majority of our lives.

Of this experience of unity via meditation the existential philospher Carl Jaspers writes, "A larger and a more comprehensive self emerged, and I could abandon the previous personality with its entire entourage. A new life began for me and from now on I felt different from other people. The self that consisted of conventional lies, of shams, of self-deception,

of memory images,--a self just like that of other people remained in me, but behind and above it stood a greater and more comprehensive self which impressed me with something of what is eternal, unchanging, immortal." Words that are not all together dissimilar to the verbal reports of the religious devotees of LSD. For the individual in the quest of the transcendental self of which Jaspers is talking, there is a movement in which the center of experience veers away from the ego, which mediates between the self and the outside world, into the self; and for this reason the usual boundaries between the self and the non-self are lost. It is out of the loss of those boundaries that one experiences the sense of unity.

A second operational characteristic of the religious experience is the quality of insight and omnipotence. There is in the experience a direct, intuitive, non-conceptual experience of the self which leads to an absolute certainty that the experience does reveal what is profoundly real, and that all other previous empirical experiences are less real, even perhaps illusory. We reach beneath the games to find what is ultimately and primitively real; and that insight, of course, leads to a feeling of great power. Who could suggest to Paul of Tarsus after his violent encounter with the Divine that he had not really met what was real and that his profound personal experience still needed further scientific verification? In the very experience itself there is the power that comes from the sense of ultimate reality.

A further quality of the religious experience is the transcendence of space and time. These dimensions become virtually meaningless for the duration of the experience. The subject of the experience tends to feel that of a sudden he stands outside time--in eternity or infinity--beyond both the past and the future. Stace describes this in terms of his own experience: "From the perspective of the timeless, I could see my life in retrospect and in prospect. It was as if it had all been lived through before--as if we had all been here before and would be here again." Incidentally, in his presentation at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, Timothy Leary began his "happening" with the words, "We have all been here before." And Dr. Alpert last night described the sense of the compression of time in the drug experience. Time and space of course require some identification with the world around one, and with the loss of that identification through the functioning of the empirical ego, the feelings of time and space are also lost.

Throughout both Christian and oriental mysticism, there is always a sense of sacredness, also a silent, hesitant response to the presence of some inspiring value, as is expressed in Rudolph Otto's term, the "mysterium tremendun". In specifically Christian writings, one finds this in the literature of the sacraments. The original Greek, after all, for the word sacrament was the word "musterion", or mystery, and it is precisely in the sacrament that the divine and the material are fused, and one encounters the two in one. This encounter with the divine through matter educes from the subject a sense of awe and reverence which is the prelude to worship.

Accompanying the sense of sacredness, of course, is a very positive feeling of joy, love, peace. The peace may be quiet or it might rise to an intense form resembling a kind of psychological climax. It is the "peace which surpasseth understanding," as much of the Christian literature has it. Anxiety is dispelled, and there is a feeling of relaxation. In milder form, it can be described as a kind of quiet tenderness.

In a rather different vein, the modes of thinking during the experience are said to be altered. Removal from the restrictions of the immediate physical environment make it possible for the mind to swing through empirically untestable realms. Contradictions, for example, which of course are rendered impossible in the physical world, are conceivable in a purely conceptual, dialectical world. You will recall that in Hegel's idealistic world of thought, there is a co-existence of contradictory ideas. And so in the world of the inner self, there is a kind of para-logic that violates all of the Aristotelian categories, and yet seems at the moment to the subject at least to be eminently logical and sensible. One can claim for example to live and die at the same time; one can speak about being "in the body and out of the body" at the same time. In violent forms of psychopathology, something of the same process is described especially by Arieti in his work on Schizophrenia, as a paleological framework. The individual can think he is both Lyndon Johnson and Jesus Christ at the same time, because these concepts, though somewhat unreconcilable in the empirical world. can co-exist comfortably in the inner world.

Finally, the religious experience can be described as one in which there is a conviction of the ineffability--the unspeakableness of the experience. Thomas Aquinas remarks that having attended the great banquet (a mystic experience), the Agape, or love feast, one finds himself incapable of telling anyone else about the experience. So intimate, so deep, so private, it defies verbal description; there are no words for it; indeed, words kill it. All that one can say is "come and see". This characteristic, of course, can be rather enormously exasperating to the listener who would like to have some description of the package before buying it.

Generally speaking, the experience is transient, lasting perhaps a few hours or a few seconds. It can lead also to some discernible positive changes in the attitude of the mystic, of the religious, toward himself, toward others, toward life, and towards the experience itself. It seems to create greater sensitivity to others, increased tolerance, and more real compassion in one's relationships with other persons. By this I am referring largely to the intra-personal phenomenon Martin Buber describes as the "I-Thou" relationship, in which the encounter takes place without the subtle and not so subtle masks that generally separate man from man.

So much for this operational and obviously very cursory description of the religious experience, drawn mostly from the literature of spontaneous mysticism in the West.

The language of our neo-mystics of today however is principally drawn from the mysticism of the East--from the Hindu, the Buddha. I feel somewhat at a loss here because both time and my own ignorance of a good portion of Eastern mysticism precludes the possibility of including that at any length in the description.

Through the categories described however, there appears to be one consistent thread. All of them describe an experience of the loss of one's normal ego functioning and one's normal ego relationships with the environment. Ego in the Freudian sense, the mediating force between the libidinal drives and the environment, is the instrument for living in this world; and if the ego is broken up or destroyed, then the person is exposed to the inner world. Ego-loss involves the reduction of reality testing, the dropping away of learned patterns of responses to people and things, and often hopefully the lowering also of the defensive patterns of handling the environment. Now

the very fascinating phenomenom here is that the ego-loss experience is characteristic not only of mystic writing as described above, but also of the psychotic condition, and of the verbal reports of the drug-induced experience. It is for this reason that Timothy Leary can say for example (and I believe with exceptional insight) that we do not rightly understand psychoticism because we do not understand mysticism. The psychotic, because the environment is altogether overwhelming for him, chooses to withdraw into the inner world where he is omnipotent, where he need not painfully check his thoughts against the world outside, and where he is safe. For him, however, the experience may not be transient, as it is for the mystic, and the self which he reaches may be fearful and frightened. But the change in logical thinking, the loss of reality testing, the feeling of being momentarily at sea, are all part of the psychotic episode as they seem to be part of the religious mystical experience. And, lastly, to the degree that one can accept the verbal reports of the psychedelic community, there is also something of the same ego-loss, which accounts for the mind-expanding qualities of which we read so very much. Thus, in order to produce the religious experience, one must "blow one's mind".

Some experiments have been done in an attempt to verify the subjective reports of subjects who claim they have experienced some mystic awareness by ingestion of LSD and similar drugs. One of these was by Pahnke at Harvard in 1962, who worked with a rather small group of subjects given an experimental drug, in this case psilocybin, and a placebo as a control drug. A questionnaire of 147 items designed specifically to measure experimental variables corresponding to the nine categories of mysticism similar to the ones I have just outlined, was constructed. The questionnaire was presented to the subjects within a week of their LSD experience, and along with written accounts, constituted the experimental scale on which changes in the direction of mystic awareness were to be recorded. The scores of the experimental subjects on this scale proved to be statistically significant in the direction of the experimental hypotheses, except for the category of the sense of sacredness. The conclusion from this study was that the experience of the hallucinogenic drug was behaviorally similar to the operational categories of mystic consciousness as we describe them.

McGlothlin's study, alluded to last evening briefly, was a much more detailed experiment. He, however, was not so much concerned with the experimental testing of the religious experience, but rather of those personality variables which mught be related to a predisposition or set for religious experience. They include a lowering of the anxiety level, less egocentric defensiveness, increased creativity and increased interest in aesthetics. The hypotheses in Dr. McGlothlin's experiment were supported, but not with statistical significance. These studies, as others in the same area, seem generally to support the fact that with people who are in some way predisposed or ready for religious experience (and I should like to underscore that aspect of it--the readiness for religious experience), there can ensue an experience by the ingestion of a hallucinogenic drug which is in many respects similar to the classically described mystical awareness.

One must, of course, as so many authors have noted, consider the set and the setting in determining specifically the LSD reaction. Dr. McGlothlin, in his paper to the American Psychological Association last September, noted two kinds of sets. First, a semi-permanent life-style and second, a more changeable motivational element depending upon physical surroundings, and so forth. What we are concerned with here is the life-style, the predisposition for a religious experience. Even if a religious experience as here

defined is possible through acid ingestion (I almost said acid indigestion), not everyone is disposed to have one.

The resemblance between the religious experience, the psychotic process, and the psychedelic experience poses what I conceive to be an enormously pregnant research question. What are the similarities and dissimilarities in the ego-loss experience as reported by mystics, psychotics, and acidheads? Some similarities we have already noted. The dissimilarities would appear to rest upon the person's readiness for religious experience, whatever that may be. We know precious little of this. To my knowledge the extent of research on this is extremely slim. A few interested students and I at Loyola are initiating a review of the literature of mysticism and of romantic literature, hopeful to develop some concrete research hypotheses in this area. This, of course, turns about the much larger question about the diagnostic differential between mystical experiences on the one hand and similar forms of psychopathology on the other. For example, is the ascetisism of the Hindu fakir or the yen for martydom of the early Christian ascetic a form of violent self-punitive masochism, or does it really constitute the heights of a religious experience? What are the relationships between what are called the heights and the depths of human experience? Research into the relationships between the ego-loss experience of the mystic, the psychotic and the acidhead could, I think contribute considerably to the fascinating problem which lies in the nether-world between religion and psychiatry.

There is one final moral question that I should like to raise (I guess I feel traditionally obliged to raise some moral question). I have in a sense alluded to it before and I think it has been implicitly suggested in some of the comments last evening. Apart from the usual moral questions of what our stance should be before the odd and inconsistent patchwork of laws that we now have in this state, there is a moral issue of a rather more personal sense. Is it in the best interests of the personal spiritual growth of the individual to obtain by drug ingestion the effect, and the transient experiences of something like a mystic awareness, which are perhaps best secured by prolonged and arduous meditation and sometimes by painful self-discovery? Can we in a word properly synthesize the experience of the mystics? What may be the long range social and personal effects of what Dr. Alpert called "a crutch" last evening? What is the personal gain of using a drug to obtain an effect that we should perhaps be developing by dint of our own arduous soul searching? I have no way of responding to that question.

What I have tried to say suggests in general that what has recently appeared in this new psychedelic religious tonality is a new and exciting dimension in the quest for God. The awareness of the presence of God and the presence of self have become fused. The dualistic splitting of God and of self has begun to vanish. I have, for example, myself heard not a few priests, rabbis or ministers in our sensitivity sessions remark that although they had made many spiritual exercises of one kind or another, they had never had a religious experience quite like this one. Now one wonders how can men in this capacity, sincere, honest, devoted, religious men derive from a self-awareness experiment or a drug-induced experience without any mention of God or religion, what can be called properly a religious experience.

There is a more immediate question of course, and one in which I presume you have a more pressing interest. It concerns the percentage of our college acidheads who do in fact enjoy such religious experience through

LSD. How many can be said to have the predisposition, the life-style, and psychological readiness for an experience which requires of the mystics years of disciplined meditation and practise? Clearly we have no statistics on this point. For what it is worth, I am convinced from my own experience working with many small group sensitivity sessions that many do; but I cannot substantiate that either. In any event, in the candor and in the honesty and mutually critical atmosphere of the sensitivity group, the genuine religious experience and the thrill-seeking experience quickly emerge in very, very sharp contrast. Differentiating between them at this point is not a very difficult task. Indeed we are in no way sure of what contributes to such a predisposition, or, on the other hand, how many students are using the vocabulary of mysticism without the experience itself. I am sure that in this case, as in so many other areas, we are forced to make individual prudential judgments in the context of individual cases. The Student Personnel officer or counselor must decide in each case. Nothing unfortunately can relieve him of the pain of individual judgment. There is simply not enough evidence to absolutize any norms for judgments, even if that were considered desirable, which I earnestly doubt. But suffice to say that the claim of a mind expanding religious experience as a function of the ingestion of LSD or any of the hallucinogenic family of drugs can by no means be discounted, as it has been, and I quote, "as sheer bunk."

To return to the awareness of God and the awareness of self. I should like to close by saying I have a suspicion, as Dr. Robinson states in Honest to God, that we have come a rather long way in our search for God. Traditionally we looked for God "out there" somewhere, for a distant God, who perhaps took a benign and occasional interest in us. We found him symbolically on the mountain, the traditionally holy place--the Mount of the Tables, the Mount of Zion. It is by no accident that the sermon on the Mount is so described. This God "out there" easily became historically the God of Law because he was the Supreme Law-giver, who handed down laws or identified with authority. This kind of God is not really livable, so we then looked for God in others. Upon Christ's suggestion that "what you do to the least of my little ones, you do to me," we sought Him in others and in the service of others. But in that ethic of service, we also found ourselves filled with a goodly amount of self-deception. How can we be sure that we did not need those whom we helped more than they needed us? C.S. Lewis has a rather delightful phrase for a social worker who was renowned for her service of others. He remarks, "She helps many, many people; indeed you can tell the people whom she has helped by their hunted expressions."

Finally, we are searching now for God in that place where we might well have been looking for him all the while. For indeed the mystics, the prophets searched deep within themselves. There in the recesses and mystery of the self we may best find what we have always implicitly known was there. There in the deep part of ourselves, we might find waht we have traditionally called the "imago Dei"--the image of God. Whatever brings us into genuine, honest contact with self, might well bring us into contact with God, however we describe Him. This is not to say that this route does not have self-deceptions of its own, or that indeed God is not to be found in other places as well. But only that this search has exciting possibilities; and I suggest we risk it. We live after all in a very secularized world (I use that instead of "secular world," in deference to Dr. Cox). In great part, we have lost our experience of the spirit, and in the place of that experience--the direct experience--of the spirit, we are asked to have faith, a faith in what is not there.

There is a prophecy in Amos about a famine not, he says (Amos), about the famine for bread nor a thirst for water but a famine for hearing the words of God. It may be that that famine is with us now that we are surfeited with the secular, and that there is a new hunger for the spiritual. We may be at the point when our faith can become vision.

END

DEPT. OF HEALTH
EDUCATION AND
WELFARE

U.S. OFFICE OF
EDUCATION

ERIC

DATE FILMED

7-18-69